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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role the arts can play in peace education, an area of interest that has received little attention. Peace education is usually integrated into other content areas such as social studies, history, language, or science. The booklet emphasizes the development of imagination in art education. Students can be brought to envision previously unimagined possibilities to creatively visualize preferable worlds and thus be empowered to ponder and work for alternatives to violence and war in conflict situations. (EH)

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PEACE EDUCATION THROUGH THE ARTS

James Collinge

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PEACE EDUCATION THROUGH THE ARTS

James Collinge

It is often stated that peace education is not to be considered a separate content area of its own, but that it could and should be dealt with in many different school subjects. When this is illustrated, the examples are often taken from such school subjects as social studies, history, language or science. In this paper James Collinge from the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, explores the role which the arts can play in peace education, an area of interest that so far has received relatively little attention. Among other things, the author emphasizes the development of imagination in art education. Students can be brought to envisage previously unimagined possibilities, to creatively visualize preferable worlds and thus be empowered to ponder and work for alternatives to violence and war in conflict situations.

Peace Education through the Arts

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what we have loved,
Others will love; and we may teach them how;

William Wordsworth, The Prelude, 1805-6 edition

Over the past few years I have been concerned with the ways in which peace education may be achieved, or at least attempted, through school subjects, with particular reference to curriculum innovations in my own country, New Zealand (Collinge, 1992a, 1992b, 1994, 1995). I have dealt with such areas as the teaching of controversial issues, science, social studies and early childhood education. One area has been notably absent, the arts, although it is an area with which I have been professionally concerned throughout my teaching life.

Probably no area of the curriculum is more neglected than the arts, and yet as Burton has noted

> the audience for art has multiplied. The perception of art as a centre of life is not confined to professionals, or even to gifted amateurs but extends to those multitudes who do not paint, draw or sculpt but for whom a life without art would be empty. (Burton, 1994, p. 477.)

Despite this interest, Burton points out, the arts are seldom accorded a central role in the plans of those who develop educational policies and design school curricula. Why is it, she ponders, that art is such an important part of our culture and yet is so neglected in education? Many schools also relegate the arts to the fringes of their activities. As an

example, a recent report of the arts curriculum in New Zealand schools, conducted by the Education Review Office, concluded that only a third of art and music programmes were delivered well and in accordance with the national curriculum (E.R.O., 1995).

What follows in this paper is a very preliminary exploration of a complex topic which has, I believe, received relatively little attention in peace education literature; the role which the arts can play in peace education. I make no claims to great originality in these ideas: indeed one of my main aims is to pay tribute to two educators who have made an explicit connection between art and peace education, Maxine Greene and Herbert Read. I am also not going to present any empirical evidence for the ideas presented here. I could not; the infrequency with which these ideas have been practised would preclude that.

To begin with, let us look at the contribution the arts have to make in education. A common view is that art education is concerned with self-expression and personal interpretation, a view which arose from the notion of child-centred education and which valued spontaneity, originality and process. While not wishing to denigrate this view of art education too much, I want to emphasize another concept which I believe lies at the heart of art education, the development of "imagination".

This is a vast subject which I can only touch on here. In her writings on the subject, Mary Warnock makes the case that the cultivation of imagination should be one of, if not the chief, aims of education, and yet is one in which our present systems most conspicuously fail. In her view the imagination

> is a power in the human mind which is at work in our everyday perception of the world, and is also at work in our thoughts about what is absent: which enables us to see the world, whether present or absent as significant, and also to present this vision to others, for them to share or reject. And this power ... is not only intellectual. Its impetus comes from the emotions as much as from the reason, from the heart as much as from the head. (Warnock, 1976, p.196.)

In Warnock's view, imagination is involved in all perception of the world, in memory of the past as well as envisaging of the future. As a means of developing the imagination the arts are of crucial importance and, for her, no school curriculum could possibly be complete or satis-

factory which did not take education in the arts as seriously as education in other subjects. Clearly there are a great many school curricula which cannot be judged as "complete or satisfactory". An education in which the arts are neglected is an education in which the development of imagination, "the means by which a future can be envisaged which is different from the present" (Warnock, 1977, p. 170), is impoverished.

Other writers on art education apart from Warnock have also noted the central importance of imagination. Gilmour regards the development of students' imagination as crucial in "their ability to perceive how complex cultural symbols function" (1994, p. 508). In his study of the art of German painter Anselm Kiefer, Gilmour draws attention to the questions the artist raises about the power that imagined scenarios have over the collective life of a people. Thus education in the arts "would have to consider strategies for developing skills in symbolic thinking that include exploring personal and cultural memory" (p. 513). Education in the arts, for Gilmour, should emphasize

> the process of thinking in symbols, that make use of "texts" that help students at all levels learn how to begin to question, to think independently of received everyday meanings and to begin to be ready to challenge inherited cultural meanings (p. 518).

The question must now be asked: what does this have to do with peace education? It is my contention here that through a true education in the arts, one which places emphasis on the development of imagination, students can be brought to envisage previously unimagined possibilities. The development of imagination is essential if students are, in Hutchinson's words, "to creatively visualize preferable worlds" or "to deconstruct colonising images of the future" (1993, p. 46).

One educator who has made a very clear connection between the arts and peace is Maxine Greene. In her numerous books and articles, Greene has advanced the view that learning is always stimulated by a sense of future possibility, of what might be. Experiences with the arts can lead to a thoughtfulness, a sense of the unexpected, what she calls "wide-awakeness". Throughout her work she argues that no encounters can release imagination in the way engagement with works of art or aesthetic enactments can release it. Imagination, she writes

> is the capacity that enables us to move through the barriers of the taken-for-granted and summon up alternative possibilities for living, for being in the world... It opens us to visions of the possible rather than the predictable, it permits us if we choose to give our imagination free play, to look at things as if they could be otherwise. (1994, pp. 494–495.)

The notion of wide-awakeness is a key theme in Greene's writing. It denotes a plane of consciousness of highest attention, an attitude of full attention to life, an active, not a passive, awareness. It obviously has much in common with Freire's "conscientization". Greene believes that the modern world is one of fragmentation in which people feel themselves impinged upon by forces they are unable to understand. Such people live in a world of myth and mystification, in which agendas and purposes are hidden. The neglect of the imagination in education signifies "an aquiescence to existence with boundaries or frames: a contained, systematized way of living closed to alternative possibilities" (Greene, 1988a, p. 45).

For her, the arts play a key role in the process of demystification, in the opening up of new perspectives and future possibilities. The arts

> have the capacity, when authentically attended to, to enable persons to hear and see what they would not ordinarily hear and see, to offer visions of consonance and dissonance that are unfamiliar and indeed abnormal, to disclose the incomplete profiles of the world... they have the capacity to defamiliarize experience: to begin with the overly familiar and transfigure it into something different enough to make those who are awakened hear and see. (Greene, 1988b, pp. 128–129.)

In her 1982 paper "Education and Disarmament" Greene makes an explicit connection between education through the arts and peace education. To her peace education is a way of educating critical and self-reflective men and women with commitments to value. She makes it clear that she is not concerned with glowing abstractions; her ideal of education has a concreteness in which people make sense of what is presented to them in the context of their own lives. An informed awareness of the arts

> provides a heightened sense of place, a sense of being in the world ... a sense of alternative realities, a recognition that things can be other than they are ... that is likely to overcome the abstractness as well as the passivity that is fostered by so many of the forces in our time. (1982, pp. 131–132.)

Education thus becomes a means of fostering value consciousness, a sensitivity to lacks and deficiencies in the world around, together with a willingness to take action to repair.

> It may be to develop the capability to imagine a world that is truly just – a world in which bombings and torture and violations of human beings become personally offensive and intolerable to increasing numbers of people, a world in which, at last, there are moral constraints (p.134).

In the final part of this paper, I would like to examine the work of an educator who has probably done as much as anyone to link the two fields of peace education and art education, the now largely neglected English poet and critic Herbert Read. A pacifist for most of his life, Read nevertheless fought through World War I. In the trenches he found a spirit of unity and unanimity that he hoped would lead to a new social order, a renewed world once hostilities ceased. He imagined that an international party of ex-combatants united by their common suffering would turn against the politicians and the profiteers in every country and create a peaceful society based on respect for the individual human being. However, he was disappointed. No such party came into existence and he wrote, "we left the war as we entered it: dazed, indifferent, incapable of any creative action. We had acquired only one new quality: exhaustion". (1963, p. 217.)

Read sought throughout his life for ways to realise this new society, a quest which led, in 1943 to the publication of what is probably his most influential book, *Education Through Art*. Despite its influence in its time (Henry Moore, the sculptor, for instance, thought it had altered the balance of the English education system), in the years since *Education Through Art* first appeared the revolution it called for has not eventuated. The emphasis in most schools is still on a narrow interpretation of the intellect, with art being relegated to the fringes. Indeed, in many ways *Education Through Art* has become a minor educational classic; its name is widely known, particularly through the International Society for Education Through Art, it is sometimes quoted, little read and heeded even less. Nevertheless, my own belief is that the time is just as appropriate as when the book was first written for Read's ideas. We are in an era in which governments promise as dark a future as ever, a future which

threatens us with the ultimate destruction of our environment.

To Read all forms of coercive power, all large scale, centrally organized political or economic entities whether communist, socialist or capitalist were abhorrent. His ideal was a cohesive community, held together not by coercive authoritarianism applied from above, but by genuine cooperation, mutual aid to use Russian anarchist Kropotkin's term. Read had an optimistic view of human nature as capable of co-operative activity, mutual respect and close communal relationships.

On the other hand he opposed what he called the cult of leadership. Only the most remarkable character, he felt, could resist the temptation of tyranny. The mass demand for popular leaders prevented full development of the individual and the growth of organic community. He drew, however, a sharp distinction between individual development in a community and that in spite of community. In the one case the uniqueness of the individual becomes part of society, in the other case the individual remains outside the pattern, an unassimilated and therefore essentially neurotic element. The key notion here is the Jungian individuation process, in which a person becomes an individual, not in the sense of an ego-centred individualism achieved at the expense of other people, but a mature awareness of the relationship a unique personality has with other people and indeed with the cosmos itself.

In all his work, Read emphasized the importance of personal values, not in the sense of individualism or egoism, but asserting an intimate connection between the person and the community. Power politics for him was an assertion that the weaknesses of human nature can be controlled by force – the inquisition and the state, police and armaments, scientific organization and a managerial elite. Read calls for a return to personal values, a respect for human personality which has been lost because people have become slaves to external things and have set up institutions to administer them. Churches, states, nations and leagues of nations are expressions of external values. One of the principle solutions Read offers to this state of affairs is education, an education concerned with personal values, moral virtue and above all an education through art.

The function of art in society, Read felt, was to expand human capacities and potentialities. Our over-emphasis on science, on reason, on cleverness at the expense of art, feeling and wisdom had limited the choices available to us. Thus the moral and spiritual regeneration of humanity, "the redemption of the robot" was to be achieved through an

education that emphasized not the intellect but the imagination and the aesthetic sense.

It was Read's belief that the aims of education should be determined by two principles: educate with reference to things and educate to unite not to divide. The first of these principles is deceptively simple: art should be the basis of education. Children must be educated by doing things, through the senses. It is only insofar as these senses are brought into harmonious and habitual relationship with the external world that an integrated personality is built up.

It is in the second of these two principles (unite not divide) that Read's political and educational ideas come together. Aesthetic education properly conceived was also moral education: the ethical and aesthetic are intimately linked. But Read did not equate the value of art with its use as a means to some end, as a means through which moral teachings are to be propagated. Art for Read was the means by which the deepest levels of the mind, collective in their representation, were expressed and consequently he believed that the moral function of art and of aesthetic education was to unite humanity in a common ideal. A key word here is "morale", a unity arising spontaneously out of the social activities of people living in a community with mutual aid as its inspiring purpose, the sort of spirit that Read thought he had found during his period of military service. However, in the introduction to his book *Education for Peace* Read rejected the idea of unity against a common enemy. He saw this as a contract or conspiracy to engage in war, a contract masked behind such phrases as "unity in a time of national emergency". We can as individuals refuse to enter such a contract. This meant Read's opposition to war was absolute. Some idea of his attitude to all forms of violence can be seen in a letter to Koestler who had asked Read to join in a protest at the Russian invasion of Hungary in 1956. Despite Read's sympathy for the Hungarian people, they had, he wrote:

> resisted force by force: they defended themselves with lethal weapons and they were defeated by stronger and more numerous lethal weapons. I am a pacifist. I believe that the only way to end war is to refuse to fight under any provocation. To protest against a war with weapons in your hand is illogical and hypocritical. (Undated letter.)

The only long term project towards peace that made any sense to Read

was educaticon. This he regarded as a pragmatic, a practical project. "Pacificism should not be a blind, emotional opposition to war but a plan for making our aggressive or destructive instincts non-lethal" (Read, 1949, p.15). Thus he advocated a way of education, indeed a way of life, that would unite human beings with nature in deep communion, which would promote a sense of community, and which would devise counter activities that fully engaged our aggressive instincts. These activities were not to be, however, just casual activities such as sports or games, but a total reform of the education system, a complete transformation of the methods and aims of education. This meant a move away from an education which emphasized competition, struggle one against the other for places, for examination results, for promotion – an education which divides.

The alternative, an education which unites. Read was convinced was one which flowed through the senses, the limbs and muscles and which was not based primarily on the faculty of abstraction. Such an education should illustrate the harmony and divine proportion of the universe, a notion for which he goes back to Plato.

> Education must be through arts, through gymnastics, through creative play of all kinds; it must be under the patronage of Dionysus rather than Apollo and it must project into the physical celebrations, into dramatic fantasies, the aggressive impulses which are latent in us all (Read, 1970, p. xi).

There is little doubt that Read today can be regarded as a voice crying in the wilderness. Even before his death in 1968 he saw that the revolution he called for in education and society was moving even further away. The present age, he thought, was not a golden age or even a silver age:

> to flatter ourselves we may call it an age of steel, but it is an age of gas, of atomization. Creative artists are oppressed by the immense futility of their efforts. (Read, 1968, p. 57.)

Nevertheless, despite the frustration, Read was always positive: one must always engage with passion in the immediate strife. His writings are a powerful reminder of the need for stability, for life lived according to a natural order, for form and pattern, values which are essential if human beings are not to be overwhelmed.

Read's gentle doctrine is not likely to find much favour among those

who would argue for a more utilitarian view of education. Neither education through the arts nor peace education are typically accorded much place in our education systems. The success of the theories which I have put forward in this paper would be difficult if not impossible to assess empirically. As Hills has pointed out, teachers of the arts will gain little from the study of texts on assessment (Hills, 1993, p. 901). Nevertheless, for me anyway, the theories of education discussed in this paper express a truth, that the arts do have a central role in education as a primary agent of the development of the imagination by means of which our students (and ourselves, of course) can, in Maxine Greene's words,

> be empowered to ponder new possibilities, alternatives to destruction and war ... to speak with their own voices, tell their own stories and, yes, to love the world (1982, p.136).

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